



Establishing a Self-Sufficient Safe Communities Program: Researching Your Options and Making Your Pitch

It takes a network of dedicated partner organizations and dependable sponsors to make a Safe Communities Coalition self-sufficient. In its broadest sense, self-sufficiency means a community supports the costs of a Safe Communities program. As will be noted later, that type of financial commitment can come about in several different ways, all of which involve the long-term commitment and participation of several sectors within the community. It is important for Safe Communities Coalitions to strive for self-sufficiency because it is an indicator of community buy-in, as well as the longevity and stability of a program. However, don't expect success in attaining self-sufficiency overnight. It requires a solid program and a foundation of participants that can make things happen.

The Arguments for Funding a Safe Communities Program

Nobody is exempt from the possibility of serious injury. Still, injuries affect some segments of the community more than others. Those segments or stakeholders, the ones who stand to benefit most from Safe Communities programs, are the ones to target with funding requests. For such stakeholders, there are many arguments for funding a Safe Communities program. A focus on the more tangible aspects of such programs (i.e., They are cost-effective and efficient.) is the best way to create demand for a program. The less tangible aspects (i.e., These programs are "good.") should be a secondary consideration in your pitch.

Safe Communities programs can be and should be cost-effective. It is readily understood that the costs of caring for injured individuals dwarf the costs of preventing those injuries. Without adequate documentation, it is too great a leap of faith for many to believe that a Safe Communities program will save a community money. The challenge is to document the costs of local trauma care and translate prevention efforts into lives and dollars saved. Local financial data from hospitals, Emergency Medical Services (EMS) agencies or insurance companies are preferable. In the absence of such data, cost estimates can be made based on the number and severity of local injuries. The National Safety

Council produces such estimates in its annual publication, **Accident Facts**.

Safe Communities programs are more efficient ways to address local injury issues. The model is built around assessing local needs and resources, and then coordinating a community-wide response to the needs. In short, Safe Communities Coalitions improve the focus of existing endeavors without duplicating them. Because they avoid duplication and coordinate local resources, Safe Communities programs are also a relatively inexpensive way to address injuries.

Some Funding Sources to Consider

Because the Safe Communities concept encompasses so many stakeholders, it also increases the number of potential supporters. There are several types of sources to consider.

Government funds are often among the first sources considered. These may be appropriate as seed or start-up funds, but do not count on them for long-term program funding.

Also, because there are so many requests to government agencies, the availability of these funds is scarce. If government funds are allotted, however, they may provide instant credibility for a Safe Communities initiative. To the wise fundraiser, this endorsement can help attract local dollars as well.

Depending on the size and the location of your community, private or corporate foundations may be a good source of start-up monies. A little research may uncover volumes of potential supporters. Like government funds, these sources do not generally provide sustained support over the lifespan of a Safe Communities program. They do, however, lend the credibility of the sponsoring organization and time to develop relationships with potential long-term patrons.

For long-term support, a Safe Communities Coalition may consider tapping resources already in place such as health care organizations, insurance providers, nonprofit organizations and other businesses. Rather than raising money to duplicate efforts, the Safe Communities model encourages coordinating existing resources. This helps the organizations do more by working together while keeping expenditures reasonable.

For health care organizations, including hospitals and managed care companies, there should certainly be a stakeholder interest in your Safe Communities program. Unfortunately, that sort of interest may not translate into financial support. Look for other business reasons that encourage an institution to provide funding. For example, many states require nonprofit health care providers to meet a community benefit standard to retain their nonprofit status. If this is the case in your community, supporting a Safe Communities program may help the provider meet this standard.

Insurance providers and other businesses also generally need a sound business reason for providing sponsorship for a Safe Communities program. The reasons can be as straightforward as a reduction in trauma-related claims or lost work days. Also, never discount the value of good public relations exposure from their

affiliation with the Coalition. Whatever the reason, companies perceive a benefit associated with supporting this type of program. It is a challenge to make a Safe Communities program consistent with a company's mission so that they can see a reason and value for their involvement. All Coalition members can and need to help address this challenge. Doing so will begin to secure a stable, local, long-term funding base for your Safe Communities program.

Another funding source that may be considered is program income. A Safe Communities Coalition may be able to affect the amount or distribution of local fines or fees. For example, an additional \$10 may be added to fines for violations of restraint use laws with this funding going to the Safe Communities program. The Coalition may charge speaker fees, conduct training sessions for which there is a fee or charge a subscription fee for its newsletter. These latter ideas will probably not generate enough income to support the entire program, but they can offset some expenses.

It is crucial to remember that self-sufficiency requires perpetual attention. It is not something to think about once a year. Finally, the earlier you begin to think toward the long term, the better your chances are for success.

Developing Hooks and Incentives for Funders

People and organizations support charities for a variety of reasons, but there is always something in it for them. It is extremely important to identify these reasons.

When considering a local entity as a potential funding source, it may be best to involve them in the program first rather than open with a request for funding. For a potential long-term funding source, Safe Communities may be an initiative that is better understood and supported by an "insider." Being involved in a Coalition leads to ownership of the program and a stake in its direction. The uniqueness and the importance of the program can turn that entity into a stable donor.

An annual membership program may interest corporate donors. Such an arrangement may include the recognition of donors on Coalition letterhead and other print materials. Plaques or certificates that are updated for each year of sponsorship are also nice ways to recognize long-term participation. If an advisory or steering committee for the program is created, large donors should be offered input that is consistent with the level of contribution. You should consult coalition members about their comfort level with the number and types of privileges an annual membership program provides.

Some donors will expect special programs from the Safe Communities Coalition. These programs will need to be tailored to the donor's workforce or target population. A company may want the Coalition to help it address off-the-job recreational injuries among its employees; or, a managed-care company may want help with a domestic violence awareness program. This is not quite a fee-for-service arrangement, but clearly the entity expects something specific and tangible as a result of their donation. The Coalition will need to determine if such requests will be honored and, if so, at what level of contribution.

Finally, a uniform incentive for donors is information. Provide regular updates on Coalition activities to all donors whether they require them or not. Routine reports help donors “track” the status of their investment and develop a sense of ownership in the program.

The most important incentives for continued support, however, are gratitude and recognition.

Making the Pitch

Once your Safe Communities Coalition has identified and researched potential funding sources, members must decide who will solicit the gift. Unless a coalition member has an established relationship with a potential donor, it makes sense to have the same person make each pitch.

It is also important to prepare a written statement that explains the Safe Communities project. This should include information about who will benefit from the program and why funds are needed. Explain the situation in your community and offer reasonable expectations. Always keep in mind that prospective donors may be totally unfamiliar with your program. Your request will almost certainly be one of many the donor receives. You must, therefore, explain your need clearly and concisely.

Remember to be patient. Although your request is the most important need to your Safe Communities Coalition the prospect may not agree, at least initially. Also, most corporations and foundations have formal funding cycles that may affect the timing of your request.

Sustainability

The most important factor on your Safe Communities Coalition’s long-term success is whether it delivers what you have promised. Keep your donors informed of your program’s progress. Thank them often. Satisfied donors are the best prospects for future gifts in two ways. First, they are likely to be repeat donors. Second, they are likely to spread the word among other potential donors. The old saying, “Success breeds success” is certainly true when it comes to fundraising.

Summary

Safe Communities Coalitions may acquire seed monies from government sources, but they should strive to become supported by local gifts or income. Reliance on federal or state sources of funding will doom a program to a relatively short life (probably 3 to 5 years). Local financial support can increase the longevity and stability of Safe Communities programs. When applying for local sponsorship, always consider the benefits to donors. The corporate world will consider a contribution to a Safe Communities program as an investment

rather than a gift. What return can your Safe Communities Coalition promise on such an investment?

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